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MARCH 1934

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FOREWORD

James Weldon Johnson

STORIES

Little Dog

Langston Hughes

Barrel Staves

Arna Bontemps

Cook

Jane Isaac

SPECIAL ARTICLES

Room in Red Square

Mary Christopher

On Spirituals

Harry T. Burleigh

HEARD SONGS

To a Tree in November

Grace Walker

Song

Pauli Murray

Two Sonnets

Countee Cullen

The First Kiss

Lutie Mae Pitts

Widow With a Moral Obligation

Helen Johnson

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C H A L L E N G E

Wishes

Articles on CURRENT EVENTS

SHORT STORIES

POEMS

ESSAYS

DECORATIONS

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CHALLENGE

A Literary Monthly

DOROTHY WEST, Editor

VOLUME I

MARCH, 1934

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FOREWORD

By James Weldon Johnson



It is a good thing that Dorothy West is doing in instituting a magazine through which the voices of younger Negro writers may be heard. The term "younger Negro writers" connotes a degree of disillusionment and disappointment for those who a decade ago hailed with loud huzzas the dawn of the Negro literary millennium. We expected much; perhaps, too much. I now judge that we ought to be thankful for the half-dozen younger writers who did emerge and make a place for themselves. But we ought not to be satisfied; many newer voices should be constantly striving to make themselves heard. But these younger writers must not be mere dilettantes; they have serious work to do. They can bring to bear a tremendous force for breaking down and wearing away the stereotyped ideas about the Negro, and for creating a higher and more enlightened opinion about the race. To do this, they need not be propagandists; they need only be sincere artists, disdaining all cheap applause and remaining always true to themselves.

It seems to me that the greatest lack of our younger writers is not talent or ability, but persistent and intelligent industry. That, I think, explains why the work of so many of them was but a flash in the pan. It is one thing just to dabble in writing and another thing to be a writer. To those who really desire to become writers let me say: Writing is not only an art, it is also a trade, a trade that demands long, arduous and dogged effort for mastery.

- Little Dog -

Langston Hughes

Miss Briggs had a little apartment all alone in a four story block just where Oakwood Drive curved past the park and the lake. Across the street, beneath her window, kids skated in winter, and in the spring the grass grew green. In summer lovers walked and necked by the lake in the moonlight. In fall brown and red-gold leaves went skithering into the water when the wind blew.

Miss Briggs came home from work every night at eight, unless she went to the movies or the Women's Civic Club. On Sunday evening she sometimes went to a lecture on Theosophy. But she was never one to gad about, Miss Briggs. Besides she worked too hard. She was the head bookkeeper of the firm of Wilkins and Bryant, Wood, Coal and Coke. And since 1930, when they had cut down the staff, she had only one assistant. Just two of them now to take care of the books, bills, and everything. But Miss Briggs was very efficient. She had been head bookkeeper for twenty-one years. Wilkins and Bryant didn't know what they would do without her.

Miss Briggs was proud of her record as a bookkeeper. Once the City Hall had tried to get her, but Wilkins and Bryant said, "No, indeed. We can pay you as much as the city, if not more.

You stay right here with us." Miss Briggs stayed. She was never a person to move about or change jobs.

As a young girl she had studied very hard in business school. She never had much time to go out. A widowed mother, more or less dependent on her then, later became completely dependent—paralyzed. Her mother had been dead for six years now.

Perhaps it was the old woman's long illness that had got Miss Briggs in the habit of staying home every night in her youth, instead of going out to the theatre or to parties. They had never been able to afford a maid even after Miss Briggs became so well paid—for doctor's bills were such a drain, and in those last months a trained nurse was needed for her mother—God rest her soul.

Now, alone, Miss Briggs usually ate her dinner in the Rose Bud Tea Shoppe. A number of genteel business women ate there, and the colored waiters were so nice. She had been served by Joe or Perry, flat-footed old Negro gentlemen for three or four years now. They knew her tastes, and would get the cook to make little special dishes for her if she wasn't feeling very well.

After dinner, with a walk of five or six blocks from the Rose Bud, the park

would come into view with its trees and lights. The Lyle Apartments loomed up. A pretty place to live, facing the park. Miss Briggs had moved there after her mother died. Trying to keep house alone was just a little too much. And there was no man in view to marry. Most of them would only want her for her money now, at her age, anyway. To move with another woman, Miss Briggs thought, would be a sort of sacrilege so soon after her mother's death. Besides, she really didn't know any other woman who, like herself, was without connections. Almost everybody had somebody, Miss Briggs reflected. Every woman she knew had either a husband, or sisters, or a friend of long standing with whom she resided. But Miss Briggs had nobody at all. Nobody.

Not that she thought about it very much. Miss Briggs was too used to facing the world alone, minding her own business, and going her own way. But one summer, while returning from Michigan where she had taken her two weeks' rest, as she came through Cleveland, on her way from the boat to the station there, she happened to pass a dog shop with a window full of fuzzy little white dogs. Miss Briggs called to the taxi man to stop. She got out and went in. When she came back to the taxi, she carried one of the little white dogs, named Flips. At least, the dealer said he had been calling it Flips because its ears were so floppy.

"They just flip and flop," the man said, smiling at the tall middle-aged woman.

"How much is he?" Miss Briggs asked, holding the puppy up.

"I'll let you have him for twenty-five dollars," the man said.

Miss Briggs put the dog down. She

thought that was a pretty steep price. But there was something about Flips that she liked, so she picked him up again, and took him with her. After all, she allowed herself very few indulgences. And somehow, this summer, Miss Briggs sort of hated going back to an empty flat—even if it did overlook the park.

Or maybe it was because it overlooked the park that had made it so terrible a place to live lately. Miss Briggs had never felt lonely, not **very** lonely, in the old house after her mother died. Only when she moved to the flat, did her loneliness really come down on her. There were some nights there, especially summer nights, when she thought she couldn't stand it, to sit in her window and see so many people going by, couple by couple, arms locked, or else in groups laughing and talking. Miss Briggs wondered why she knew no one, male or female, to walk out with, laughing and talking. She knew only the employees where she worked, and with whom she associated but little, (for she hated to have people know her business). She knew, of course, the members of the Women's Civic Club, but in a cultural sort of way. The warmth of friendship seldom mellowed her contacts there. Only one or two of the club women had ever called on her. Miss Briggs always believed in keeping her distance, too. Her mother used to say she'd been born poor but proud, and would stay that way.

"Folks have to amount to something before Clara takes up with them," old Mrs. Briggs always said. "Men'll have a hard time getting Clara."

Men did. Now, with no especial attractions to make them keep trying,

Miss Briggs, tall and rail-like, found herself left husbandless at an age when youth had gone.

So in her forty-fourth year, coming back from a summer boarding house in Michigan, Miss Briggs bought herself a little white dog. When she got home, she called on the janitor and asked him to bring her up a small box for Flips. The janitor, a tow-headed young Swede, brought her a grape-fruit crate from the A. & P. Miss Briggs put it in the kitchen for Flips.

She told the janitor to bring her, too, three times a week, a dime's worth of dog meat or bones, and leave it on the back porch where she could find it when she came home. On other nights Flips ate dog biscuits.

Flips and Miss Briggs soon settled on a routine. Each evening when she got home she would feed him. Then she would take him for a walk. This gave Miss Briggs an excuse for getting out, too. In warm weather she would walk around the little lake fronting her apartment with Flips on a string. Sometimes she would even smile at other people walking around the lake with dogs at night. It was nice the way dogs made things friendly. It was nice the way people with dogs smiled at her occasionally because she had a dog, too. But whenever (as seldom happened) someone in the park, dog or no dog, tried to draw her into conversation, Miss Briggs would move on as quickly as she could without being rude. You could never tell just who people were, Miss Briggs thought, or what they might have in their minds. No, you shouldn't think of taking up with strange people in parks. Besides, she was head bookkeeper for Wilkins and Bryant, and in these days of robberies and kidnappings maybe they just

wanted to find out when she went for the pay roll, and how much cash the firm kept on hand. Miss Briggs didn't trust people.

Always by ten o'clock, she was back with Flips in her flat. A cup of hot milk then maybe, with a little in a saucer for Flips, and to bed. In the morning she would let Flips run down the back steps for a few minutes, then she gave him more milk, left a pan of water, and went to work. A regular routine, for Miss Briggs took care of Flips with great seriousness. At night when she got back from the Rose Bud Tea Shoppe, she fed him biscuits, or if it were dog meat night, she looked out on the back porch for the package the janitor was paid to leave. (That is, Miss Briggs gave the Swede fifty cents a week to buy bones. He could keep the change.)

But one night the meat was not there. Miss Briggs thought perhaps he had forgotten. Still he had been bringing it regularly for nearly two years. Maybe the warm spring this year made the young janitor listless, Miss Briggs mused. She fed Flips biscuits.

But two days later, another dog meat night, the package was not there either. "This is too much!" thought Miss Briggs. "Come on, Flipsy, let's go downstairs and see. I'm sure I gave him fifty cents this week to buy your bones."

Miss Briggs and the little white dog went downstairs to ask why there was no meat for a dog to eat. When they got to the janitor's quarters in the basement, they heard a mighty lot of happy laughter and kids squalling, and people moving. They didn't sound like Swedes, either. Miss Briggs was a bit timid about knocking, but she finally mustered up courage with Flips there

beside her. A sudden silence fell inside.

"You, Leroy," a voice said. "Go to de door."

A child's feet came running. The door opened like a flash and a small colored boy stood there grinning.

"Where—where is the janitor?" Miss Briggs said, taken aback.

"You mean my papa?" asked the child, looking at the gaunt white lady. "He's here." And off he went to call his father.

Surrounded by children, a tall broad shouldered Negro of perhaps forty, gentle of face and a little stooped, came to the door.

"Good evenin'," he said pleasantly.

"Why, are you the janitor?" stammered Miss Briggs. Flips had already began to jump on him with friendliness.

"Yes'm, I'm the new janitor," said the Negro in a softly beautiful voice, kids all around him. "Is there something I can help you to do?"

"Well," said Miss Briggs, "I'd like some bones for my little dog. He's missed his meat two times now. Can you get him some?"

"Yes'm, sure can," said the new janitor, "if all the stores ain't closed." He was so much taller than Miss Briggs that she had to look up to him.

"I'd appreciate it," said Miss Briggs, "please."

As she went back upstairs she heard the new janitor calling in his rich voice, "Lora, you reckon that meat store's still open?" And a woman's voice and a lot of children's answered him.

It turned out that the store was closed. So Miss Briggs gave the Negro janitor ten cents and told him to have the meat there the next night when she came home.

"Flips, you shan't starve," she said to the little white dog, "new janitor or no new janitor."

"Wruff!" said Flips.

But the next day when she came home there was no meat on the back porch either. Miss Briggs was puzzled, and a little hurt. Had the Negro forgotten?

Scarcely had she left the kitchen, however, when someone knocked on the back door and there stood the colored man with the meat. He was almost as old as Miss Briggs, she was certain of it, looking at him. Not a young man at all, but he was awfully big and brown and kind-looking. So sort of sure about life as he handed her the package.

"I thought some other dog might get it on the porch," said the colored man, "so I kept it downstairs till you came."

Miss Briggs was touched. "Well, thank you very much," she said.

When the man had gone, she remembered that she had not told him how often to get meat for the dog.

The next night he came again with bones, and every night from then on. Miss Briggs did not stop him, or limit him to three nights a week. Just after eight, whenever she got home, up the back porch steps the Negro would come with the dog meat. Sometimes there would be two or three kids with him. Pretty little brown-black, rather dirty kids, Miss Briggs thought, who were shy in front of her, but nice.

Once or twice during the spring, the janitor's wife instead brought the dog meat up on Saturday nights. Flips barked rudely at her. Miss Briggs did not take kindly to the creature either. She was fat and yellow, and certainly too old to just keep on having children

as she evidently did. The janitor himself was so solid and big and strong! Miss Briggs felt better when he brought her the bones for her dog. She didn't like his wife.

That June, on warm nights, as soon as she got home, Miss Briggs would open the back door and let the draft blow through. She could hear the janitor then coming up the rear stairs when he brought the bones. And, of course, she never said more than good evening to him and thank you. Or, here's a dollar for the week. Keep the change.

Flips ate an awful lot of meat that spring. "Your little dog's a regular meat-hound," the janitor said one night as he handed her the bones; and Miss Briggs blushed for no good reason.

"He does eat a lot," she said. "Good night."

As she spread the bones out on paper for the dog, she felt that her hands were trembling. She left Flips and went into the parlor, but found that she could not keep her mind on the book she was reading. She kept looking at the big kind face of the janitor in her mind, perturbed that it was a Negro face, and that it stayed with her so.

The next night she found herself waiting for the dog meat with more anxiety than Flips himself. When the colored man handed it to her, she quickly closed the door, before her face got red again.

"Funny old white lady," thought the janitor as he went back downstairs to his basement full of kids. "Just crazy about that dog," he added to his wife. "I ought to tell her it ain't good to feed a dog so much meat."

"What do you care, long as she wants to?" asked his wife.

The next day in the office Miss Briggs found herself making errors over the books. That night she hurried home to be sure and be there on time when he brought the dog meat up, in case he came early.

"What's the matter with me," she said sharply to herself, "rushing this way to feed Flips? Whatever is the matter with me?" But all the way through the warm dusky streets, she seemed to hear the janitor's deep voice saying, "Good evenin'," to her.

Then when the Negro really knocked on the door with the meat, she was trembling so that she could not go to the kitchen to get it. "Leave it right there by the sink," she managed to call out. "Thank you, Joe."

She heard the man going downstairs sort of humming to himself, a kid or so following him. Miss Briggs felt as if she were going to faint, but Flips kept jumping up on her barking for his meat.

"Oh, Flips," she said, "I'm so hungry." She meant to say, You're so hungry. So she repeated it. "You're so hungry! Heh, Flipsy, dog?"

And from the way the little dog barked, he must have been hungry. He loved meat.

The next evening, Miss Briggs was standing in the kitchen when the colored man came with the bones.

"Lay them down," she said, "thank you," trying not to look at him. But as he went downstairs, she watched through the window his beautifully heavy body finding the rhythm of the steps, his big brown neck moving just a little.

"Get down!" she said sharply to Flips barking for his dinner.

To herself she said earnestly, "I've got to move. I can't be worried being so far from a meat shop, or from where I eat my dinner. I think I'll move downtown where the shops are open at night. I can't stand this. Most of my friends live downtown anyway."

But even as she said it, she wondered what friends she meant. She had a little white dog named Flips, that was all. And she was acquainted with the other people at Wilkins and Bryant, but she had nothing to do with them. She was the head bookkeeper. She knew a few women in the Civic Club fairly well. And the Negro waiters at the Rose Bud Shoppe. And this janitor.

Miss Briggs decided that she could not bear to have this janitor come upstairs with a package of bones for Flips again. She was sure he was happy down there with his portly yellow wife and his house full of children. Let him stay in the basement, then, where he belonged. She never wanted to see him again, never.

The next night, Miss Briggs made herself go to a movie before coming home. And when she got home, she fed Flips dog biscuits. That week she began looking for a new apartment, a small one for two, herself and the dog. Fortunately there were plenty to be had, what with people turned out for not being able to pay the rent—which would never happen to her, thank God! She had saved her money. When she found an apartment, she deposited the first month's rent at once. On her coming Saturday afternoon off, she planned to move.

Friday night, when the janitor came up with the bones, she decided to be just a little pleasant to him. Probably she would never see him again. Per-

haps she would give him a dollar for a tip then. Something to remember her by.

When he came upstairs, she was aware a long time of his feet approaching. Coming up, up, up, bringing bones for her dog. Flips began to bark. Miss Briggs went to the door. She took the package in one hand. With the other she offered the bill.

"Thank you so much for buying bones for my little dog," she said. "Here, here is a dollar for your trouble. You keep it all."

"Much obliged, ma'am," said the astonished janitor. He had never seen Miss Briggs so generous before. "Thank you ma'am! He sure do eat a heap o' bones, your little dog."

"He almost keeps me broke buying bones," Miss Briggs said, holding the door.

"True," said the janitor. "But I reckon you don't have much other expenses on hand, do you? No family and all like me?"

"You're right," answered Miss Briggs. "But a little dog is so much company, too."

"Guess they are, ma'am," said the janitor, turning to go. "Well, good-night, Miss Briggs. I'm much obliged."

"Goodnight, Joe."

As his broad shoulders and tall brown body disappeared down the stairs, Miss Briggs slowly turned her back, shut the door, and put the bones on the floor for Flipsy. Then suddenly she began to cry.

The next day she moved away as she had planned to do. The janitor never saw her any more. For a few days, the walkers in the park beside the lake wondered where a rather gaunt middle-aged woman who used to come out at night

with a little white dog, had gone. But in a very short while the neighborhood had completely forgotten her. And nobody in the Lyle Apartments gave a

second thought to Miss Briggs or her little white dog at all, not even the janitor whom she had tipped a whole dollar to remember her by.

To a Tree in November

GRACE WALKER

Bleak winter takes the earth in its embrace.
The trees are bared:
Not one solitary leaf is spared.

The tree that yesterday was full of song
Has voice no more.
Those happy-hearted melodies are o'er.

I hear the wind moan thru its naked boughs
Stirring in me
A warm, new-born compassion for this tree.

'Tis strange a dying tree should grieve me thus.
Yet, I know why!
Not for the tree; 'tis for myself I sigh.

When in the embrace of life's winter
I am caught,
All hopes and dreams of youth shall come to naught.

Falling like withered leaves wrung from the bough
To which they cling. . . .
I, too, shall only moan. . . and never sing. . . .

Room in Red Square

MARY CHRISTOPHER

If ever it lies within my power. I will go back to Moscow. I will go back to a room in Red Square that held very much of my happiness, and some passing sadness, and wild hysteria in infrequent hours.

There is only one way to go to Russia. Not as a tourist, paying voluta, which is the hallowed name for foreign currency, and seeing Muscovite behavior from those amazing Lincolns that stand outside the bourgeois hotels, manned by the most reckless chauffeurs in the world, and interpreters intelligent enough to show the gaping, gory-minded foreigners Russia in her summer frock of picturesque peasant in his smock and straw shoes, and city worker in his park of culture and rest.

It is hardly worth one's while to go as an unskilled experimenter. The majority of Russia's detractors are the disappointed down-and-outers who have come to regard Russia as the paradise of the underprivileged. They sincerely believe that to say one is poor and untutored is the only introduction necessary to the high seats of the mighty. Which seats they innocently expect to sit in right alongside Stalin.

Once in Dniepergest, just after the completion of the dam, a snarling, illiterate, Russian-born American invaded the private railway car where I sat with a group of foreign specialists, and relieved herself of a counter-revolutionary speech that was a gem.

She had come to Russia as a factory worker, and was still a factory worker, living in the same unsanitary conditions she had lived in—what she now sentimentally called—back home. She had saved her pennies toward her passage to the Union, where she felt she had only to cry, Down with capitalism, to find herself the possessor of a supervisor's job.

The group of foreign specialists were unmoved. They, on the contrary, had come to Russia with no illusions about her, rather with scepticism as to her ability to house and feed so many of them. And they had found her a veritable Utopia for the foreigner with something to offer.

I have no specialty to offer Russia. I can neither build a bridge nor plan an underground. Nor can I qualify as a specialized worker. I do not read proof. I

type slowly. By grace of face and figure I fitted into a specialist group that was got together for a propaganda film. Russia has no particular need of me. And for practical reasons I will not return unless she invites me. For Russia has room, or rather, makes room, for the invited specialist only.

Until the first of May there were three million souls in Moscow. Moscow can comfortably house half that number. Of this surplus the majority were peasant stragglers to the city. The room shortage was alarming. Starvation was growing too obvious. It is not good for the bourgeois correspondents to be accosted on every corner by peasants whining, "Give me bread," or to stumble upon them asleep in the streets. For every correspondent is an enemy.

A new passport system was speeded into effect. Everyone had to produce a passport, and it was one's office that wrote one up. Thousands of peasants were carted in truckloads to the outskirts of the city. Only the sentimentalist can weep over this. It is better to lie in a soft bed of clover than on a hard park bench.

When one realizes how many millions of unimportant peasants there are in all Russia, who take no part in her program of progress, one lays no blame on her for lightly dismissing them. Crack Communists are being sent continually to backward communities to preach social reform. The old heads pay them little

heed. But the youngsters, who are Russia's hope, hang on to every word. The youth of Russia is an old politician compared to his bourgeois cousin.

The Russian specialists were, of course, undisturbed by the new system. There is a distinct higher class in Moscow made up, not of the monied nor the socially select, but of Russia's brains. There is the House of Government, a most modern apartment building, where live the government heads and their households. There are sometimes six rooms for a man and his wife. The ordinary couple live in one with the use of a community kitchen.

Apparently these specialists have everything, competent servants, good wines, stout clothing, sufficient food. It is only when they plan a party that the solid refreshment part of it becomes a problem. For one eats by a norm in Moscow, so much a month to each individual.

At party times one's close friends contribute part of their products for the month toward a sumptuous table. It is only when unexpected callers come that the hostess graciously, and with no apologies, passes the sugar as far as it will go, and then passes candy, or halves the small exquisite cakes, and sometimes quarters them.

There are foreign specialists who are paid entirely in voluta, those who receive part voluta and part roubles, and those who get roubles only. These latter are often Soviet sympathizers, who realize Russia's great need

of gold, and voluntarily give up their voluta rights, accepting all their pay in roubles.

It is interesting to speculate on how many roubles they receive. For the official exchange is not quite two roubles for one dollar, or was, during the author's stay. I accept this as legal when the gold rouble is the basis of the exchange. But I cannot be persuaded that Russia has a right to give the green foreigner paper roubles for his dollars. An acquaintance of mine changed \$75 into less than one hundred and fifty paper roubles at the border.

In Moscow at the time I left the illegal exchange was fifty roubles to the dollar. There are a number of government stores in Russia called Torgsin; here one can buy for voluta all Russia's export products. At one time the Russian bourgeoisie were glad to exchange roubles for dollars, which they immediately converted into Torgsin bonds, with which they bought staple foods. The foreign press correspondents were selling voluta so fast that it became an open scandal. They were no longer permitted to trade in their well-stocked store for roubles. It was turned into a Torgsin branch, where only foreign currency was accepted.

Those Russians, who looked most Russian, rarely bought foreign money. They dared not venture into Torgsin with it. For, of course, no Russian is supposed to have voluta. And if it is found on his person, he explains to the O. G. P. U. (State Political Police).

Torgsin has recently made very rigid rules. There is a new necessary policy of accepting gold and silver articles. When a Russian brings in such an article, it is recorded as silver pitcher or gold plate on the purchasing slip he thereafter uses. Consequently no Russian dares risk having voluta recorded on a formal piece of paper bearing his long Russian name. An acquaintance of mine had fifty dollars he wanted to change in a hurry. That amount would buy staple food enough to last several months. But no one would touch it.

The exchange at the border is probably the basis for the exaggerated stories of the high cost of living in Russia. It is true that on the open market sugar is often twenty roubles a pound, and a pair of shoes cost over a hundred. But these are paper roubles. And it is impossible to estimate the paper rouble's worth in comparison with the dollar's. The impression is that one, in paying, say, two roubles for a glass of tea, thereby pays a dollar.

That was my early impression. My first purchase in Russia was a dish of ice-cream. It cost three paper roubles. I naturally felt I was paying a dollar and a half for one small ice, and could hardly swallow it. Weeks later it was nothing to me to pay five roubles in the better dining rooms. By that time I had learned that the paper rouble has no voluta value.

By actual experience I later tried in Torgsin—armed with the receipt given me at the border—

to redeem the money I had unwittingly exchanged. I offered to give them as many paper roubles as had been given me, in return for Torgsin bonds. This request was received with surprise and refused with alacrity, but without explanation.

There is a book in Russia that has taken the place of the Bible. It is the foreign book, the open sesame to the food and clothing stores for foreigners. Occasionally there is talk of abolishing it. It hardly seems fair that foreign specialists who are not always in sympathy with the union are given food and clothing over and above the Russians in quality and quantity.

Russia has a good explanation for this. She does not do this out of love, but out of necessity. She needs the foreign specialist. Therefore she will do what she can to keep him happy and contented. She tries to give him as many of the bourgeois privileges as he enjoys in his own country.

Most of the apparel in the clothing store is not at all to the taste of foreigners. Therefore there was scandalous speculation by the unprincipled until the norm was cut so low that now, altho speculation continues, it is very much moderated.

The peasant, in town on his rest day, will buy almost anything and pay almost anything for it. So will some city workers who have so little in their own shops. Enormous profits are made—a contemptible practice, because there are always one's friends to whom one can sell

without profit.

Men and women have a right to normal wanting. The departing foreigner should freely give or sell cheap the things from his bourgeois country he can shortly duplicate. Yet a Russian is thought disloyal who wants even the plainest apparel from another country. Incidentally, one cannot sell a fancy frock for the smallest sum. Their wants are practical. Their tastes are simple and almost severe.

No Russian would think of buying from the bourgeois. Such an act could too easily be misinterpreted as dissatisfaction with the Five Year Plan. But it is common sense to take what is at hand. The few worn things the specialist leaves behind are little recompense for the multiple courtesies, unflagging interest, and daily devotion of time that the Russians, though harassed by their own affairs, give to those they consider sympathetic foreigners.

The specialist who is not interested in speculation has little traffic with the clothing store. But he owes his very existence to the foreign food store. The Russians come to red-cheeked maturity on a diet of black bread. But it is an accepted saying that a foreigner cannot live without a foreign book.

Last December, 1932, when there was a great curtailment of books, the majority of those who lost theirs, left Moscow immediately. The future was something they simply dared not face.

The book entitles one to bread,

meat, and other necessities. There is never any variety. One can manage if one is not too finicky. There are always beef and pork, almost always frankfurters, occasionally ham, occasionally fowl. There is usually cheese. Of late there have been no eggs. There are always butter, bread, sugar, cereals and flour. Potatoes almost always. Generally canned fruit. Always fresh and smoked fish. Generally one or two green vegetables. Cigarettes and liquors always. And always apples, good or bad. Always milk for the sick; fairly often milk for everybody. Candy always, sometimes excellent. Cakes usually, often excellent. I believe I have recollected everything.

This list may look impressive, but only a few pounds of each product are allotted one person. Nor can these things be got every day. There is actually a book made up of coupons. Once these coupons are cut, there is no recourse. And it is difficult to make them last the month. I have often cut all my meat coupons for the first half of the month on a day in which I had planned dinner for four.

I begrudged my intimates nothing. But the casual friends who flocked in and asked for tea gave me the first feeling I ever had about food. I never knew I could resent anyone's eating my bread and butter. But it's hardly a lark to stand in one line twenty minutes for a loaf of bread, then in another line a good half hour for a pound of

sugar, and then in other lines for this thing and that no less than ten minutes each, and often longer.

I have come very close to hysteria in the hours I have spent in the food store. I have actually had a fine fit of it when I finally reached my room, with food enough in my heavy knapsack to last perhaps three days, only to have some half dozen folks I didn't care a fig for barge in and eat everything up within an hour. There are not many slices in a loaf of bread, nor many spoonfuls in a pound of sugar, nor many pats of butter in a half pound.

It is one's sugar one comes to guard most. For all other food failing, there is always comfort in a glass of hot tea. I have placed candy conspicuously in the center of the table; for candy with tea is a Russian custom. But someone invariably, and with a glad shout, ferrets out my sugar. I have a friend who fills her spoon with sugar, dips the spoon in her tea, and then eats the sugar. It takes considerable sugar to consume a tall glass of tea.

I think there are very few foreigners who have not at some time or other lent their food books to their Russian friends for the various products that are without norm and can be procured every day. These include caviar and smoked fish, a delicious sour cream called *smetana*, and the more expensive cakes. Bread, too, though there are talons for it, can be got every

day. And I, alone, never ate a whole loaf.

There were many things with norm that I, doing very little cooking, did not need. Cheese, I don't like particularly, nor cereals. Flour, fresh fish, canned fish, most vegetables, and apples I rarely took. And as the cmetana line was the longest in the store, I usually stood in it for twenty minutes and then tore out.

Therefore all these things my friends were welcome to. Often three days would go by in which I saw neither hide nor hair of my book. In the meantime my bread would get as hard as a brick. But this escape from the store was such a saving of my nerves that tea and tack were not hardships.

And if I got very hungry, it was fun indeed to go and spend a fortune in a bourgeois dining room. The average salary is between three and five hundred roubles per month. A decent dinner costs around twenty-five

roubles. One doesn't eat out very often.

I have no material reasons for wanting to go back to Russia. They are all spiritual. But is there such a thing as recapture? I am older by a year. I cannot pretend to the same eagerness. Russia is for me no longer uncharted. Did I grow very much? Was I snatched away in the midst of my growth? Yet I gave Russia no specialty. She has no reason to recall me.

But I will have a nostalgia for Moscow as long as I live. There is my lost youth and all things lovely. There is my bright adventure.

I will long for the Black Sea, and the ports thereof, Odessa, Yalta, tropic Suchum. For Tiflis, and that fine stretch of beauty that is the Georgian Highway. For the wonder of Dneipergest, the white surge of its waters. All these I will love and remember. For beauty survives though nations fall, and rise, and fall again.

Song

PAULI MURRAY

Because I know deep in my own heart
That every Poet must have his Song,
That Joy and Sorrow are never far apart
And Love, at best, seldom lasts for long;

Because I know that ecstasy and pain
Are twin strings thrummed on the soul's lyre
I will not cry "I Love You!"—but fain
Would say, "I want you always near."

Barrel Staves

ARNA BONTEMPS

Skeeter Gordon was an exile. His friends in Harlem had turned on him. His young chocolate-colored wife had bristled like a porcupine and evicted him with sudden dispatch and finality. When the door banged behind him, Skeeter was sprawled face downward on a small landing a dozen steps below. He was convinced that Harlem was no longer safe for him. He had been cast from his last stronghold.

The explanation is simple: Skeeter was dishonest. He had double-crossed his young friends, the black boys who had stood by him; and he had deceived the girl who had taken up with him when he was ragged as a picked sparrow. He was a no-'count, ungrateful nigger, and he deserved the worst thing that could happen to him.

During his exile the lean spidery black boy took refuge in the upper Bronx. There, in the vicinity of East 225th Street, he found many other black faces sprinkled like pepper over the Jewish and Italian neighborhood. Here in this far end of the Bronx, however, he was a total stranger; and if he had no friends, neither had he enemies. Life, miserably tangled in Harlem, seemed to him very simple here; and best of all, it was safe.

He shuffled serenely down White

Plains Avenue, his hands in his hip pockets, a tune on his lips.

Walked de streets from sun to sun,

Lawd, Lawd!

Walked de streets from sun to sun—
Ain't got no money an' don't want none.

He was coatless, with a frayed shirt and a pair of purplish blue pants that hit him six inches above the ankles; but as he walked he flapped his long comical feet proudly, swaying from one side of the pavement to the other, as if he owned the street.

"Heah's where I gits a fresh start," he told himself. "I gonna 'gin all over 'gin. I gonna git me a lil odd job an' a steady hard-workin' gal whut ain't so hot-haired an' settle down. Tha's whut I gonna do. I ain't gonna be no mo' devilish tramp. Hm!"

He turned into 223rd Street and lazied eastward in the bright afternoon sunlight. His slick round head glistened like ebony. After a month of stuffy Harlem pigeon-holes, this fresh air was a blessing. The Skeeter was feeling good and he didn't care who knew it. He was as happy as a colt in a new pasture.

"If it wa'n't so hot, I'd jus break and run," he said. "I feels lak another nigger. I done almost forgit ma name's bad-luck Skeeter."

There were two or three small apartment houses at long intervals in the block between the rows of private dwellings. On the sidewalk, in front of one of the smallest of these tenements, Skeeter saw black youngsters playing. That indicated the sort of place he had been seeking. He flopped on the step, stretched his incredible legs, produced from his pockets a mashed-up palm-leaf fan and leaned back to refresh himself.

"Ah!" he grunted. "Hm!"

The children frisked wildly about his feet. Since he had decided to remain in this part of the city, his interest kept running out to those features of the neighborhood that might effect his living. He wondered about the sources of food, about a place to sleep. Given a chance, he could at that very moment have punished a stiff bait of victuals. And as for sleeping, that was never out of the question. He could always sleep. He could sleep standing up. The fact that he felt drowsy there in the sunshine, on the warm concrete steps, was neither odd or significant.

Presently an old rheumatic Negro came up from the basement and eyed Skeeter pleasantly. The old fellow wore a pair of striped overalls and a battered cap that had once, perhaps, belonged to some steamboat man. His face was matted with frizzly whiskers, and Skeeter noticed that he was not more than five feet tall.

"He-o, fas' company," the old fellow offered.

"He-o, Cap'n," Skeeter grinned.

"Is you a Harlem boy?"

"Hm. I was, I ain't no mo'. I done leave town."

"Dis heah is a slow-time place for city niggers."

"You reckon I can find me a lil odd

job an' a place to sleep round heah, Cap'n?"

The old sawed-off black looked the long indolent boy up and down.

"Is you any 'count?"

"Me? I's one mo' hard workin' nigger, Cap'n. I's de workingest nigger you mos' ever set eyes on."

"Yo' look is kind o' deceivin'. Reckon you could tote a ash can up these heah steps by yo'self?"

Skeeter tried to show scorn. "Shucks! I could come up them there steps wid a ash can under both arms an' one on ma back."

"Lemme study a minute. If you's worth a dime, you might could stay heah an' sleep in de boiler room an' help me wid de garbage an' wid de ash cans."

They descended the steps to the basement and Skeeter followed the Cap'n down a dark hallway. The old fellow pointed out the boiler room, the little hot-water furnace, the coal bins, and the dumb waiter shafts. Half a dozen large cans were arranged against the wall.

"Heah they is," the Cap'n said.

But Skeeter was no longer interested. His head was raised; his eyes were turned skyward; he had caught a glimpse of something two floors above that deflected his attention. A glossy velvet-skinned young woman was standing at the window, her face split with a huge smile.

The black girl was evidently in the midst of her cooking. In one hand she held a dish rag, in the other a long-handled spoon. And there was an odor of food pouring from her window, an odor so strong and compelling it made Skeeter's jaws hang apart like a pair of tongs.

Suddenly the young woman turned away from the window and burst into song:

"Ma daddy is a business man, a business man,

Keys in his pocket an' a diamond on his han."

"I done decide, Cap'n," Skeeter said.

"It's your'n if it suits you."

"It suits me good, Cap'n. Look out o' ma way now whilst I shows you how to tote three ash cans at a time."

* * * * *

Skeeter's little gesture in the area-way did not go unnoticed. Adina, the velvety gal at the kitchen window, saw him juggling the heavy cans and she was deeply impressed.

"Hush ma mouth wide open," she exclaimed. "Wonder where de Super' found dat ole good-lookin' devil."

She forgot her pots. Resting her elbows on the window sill, leaning as far out as she dared, she became engrossed in the performance below. Suddenly she shouted:

"Hey Super! Look lak you gonna have some help?"

"Yeah, Miss Dina, I done got me a 'sistant."

"Reckon he any 'count?"

"Don't know yet, but I gonna put him through de mill directly."

"Whyn't you send him up heah an' start him on dis sink o' mine, whut I been tryin' to git you fix ever since las' month?"

"Das a notion, Miss Dina." The Cap'n dropped his eyes. Skeeter was returning empty-handed. The old fellow pointed to the gal in the window. "Dat lady y'nder is havin' trouble wid her sink. You mind lookin' at it for me?"

Skeeter threw another glance up-

wards.

"Open de door, Miss Sheba, I's comin' up fas' an' I is apt to bus' it down."

He made a break for the tools. When Adina reached the door he was already there. He arched his neck and entered the little kitchen. The room was bursting with the odors of frying meat and onions, boiling vegetables and ham hocks. Skeeter stood in the center of the floor, dazed by his surroundings.

"M-m-m!" He shook his head expressively, "I ain't been this close to a bait o' good ole home cookin' in mo' days'n I can count."

"You's right pitiful."

"Sho is. De womens in Harlem was fixin' to let me die. Tha's how come me out heah."

"Dis heah is a mo' betta place to die," she said compassionately. "Was you to pass out in one o' dem cellars in Harlem, de rats'd eat you."

He shuddered. "Dat dey would. But I gonna die out heah on y'all's hands."

"Whyn't you try me on a lil smell o' dem victuals you's cookin'? You'll see what a big diff'ence it'll make in papa Skeeter."

Adina was a short, big-hipped girl. She wore a checkered house dress without sleeves, and as she carried on with Skeeter she leaned against the ice box with obvious coquetry.

"Maby I will an' maby I won't," she said. "I gonna wait an' see how good you fixes ma sink."

Skeeter banged the tool box on the floor.

"You ole big eyed sumpin o' nuther."

He quickly disconnected the drain, fitted a new washer, then reattached the pipe. It was like sleight-of-hand.

Skeeter was a case. He was one of the most handiest boys Adina had ever set eyes on.

"How dat suit you, Miss?"

"Ah, so-so," she said. "I 'spect you'll do."

Adina took a large plate from the shelf, heaped it to capacity and placed it at a tiny rickety table. Skeeter adjusted a chair, stretched his legs and went to work.

* * * * *

That one mighty meal did not satisfy Skeeter for long, however, and the next day he was out job-hunting. The sun had come up strong and the streets were dry and dusty. Dust had settled on the leaves of the trees like powder. A string of empty milk wagons lined the curb near 219th Street. The proprietors of countless fruit stands were busy arranging their displays. These impressed Skeeter. He planted himself in front of one, drew his fan and stood calmly inspecting the pyramids of red apples, ripe oranges and yellow pears.

"Dog if dat ain't a sight," he mused. "Tha's jest nachal-born putty."

Around the heaps of bright fruit were designs of fresh mustard greens, lettuce, spinach, cabbages and collards, green onions, carrots, beets, asparagus—all looking fresh and moist as if they had never been harvested, as if the natural dew was still on them. From the ceiling suspended great bunches of bananas, ripe and yellow and fine. And elsewhere strings of crimson peppers hung against the walls, strings of dried figs and mushrooms. Mountains of earth-colored potatoes rose in the background, and cocoanuts were scattered among the green things as if literally dropped there from the trees. Water-

melons lay about the floor, between the sacks and baskets.

Skeeter was too absorbed to move. He stood in the middle of the sidewalk, the palm leaf fan in his hand, mouth open. His little glossy head suggested a billiard ball.

The fruit man's small motor truck, parked at the curb, was still partly loaded with crates and boxes of vegetables from the wholesale market. Angelo had neglected it for the moment and was passing over his display with a water sprinkler to protect the greens from the wilting heat of the sun. A few morning customers, too, had begun to require his attention. He was a short, thickly built Italian with loose curly hair, a white apron, and a tiny cap on the back of his head. At the moment his face was red with the hurry and excitement of setting his stand in order.

"M-m!" Skeeter ejaculated. "Dat gits it. Tha's a purty howdy-dō, I thank you."

"Yeah? You like um?"

"I'm tellin' you."

"You wanna buy some nice sweet cranges? bananas? apples?"

"You done mistook me, Mistah. I couldn't buy a pair o' slippers for a muskeeter. Money an' me ain't speakin'. I's jes studyin' 'bout you in dis great big fruit sto' by yo'self. You oughta have a black boy to keep it all sweep up nice an' clean an' unload de truck an' one thing an' another."

Angelo inspected the long boy carefully. Then he looked at his floor and his half-loaded truck. That was an idea, especially since Skeeter appeared to be such inexpensive help. A boy as ragged as this bare-headed stranger surely wouldn't have a large salary in mind.

"You t'ink so, hunh? You like-a job?"

"Yes suh, me like-a'." Skeeter grinned. "Me 'like-a plenty."

"Al'right. Sweep um up." He thrust a broom into Skeeter's hands. "You good boy, maybe I keep you."

"Yes suh!"

Skeeter commenced working with a flourish that won the Italian's eye immediately. His broom danced over the floor with a grace and skill like magic. Not a straw or leaf was missed. That finished he turned to the truck, unloaded the remainder of the vegetables, quickly transported them through the store out into the shady back yard, and covered them with wet sacks.

Angela sat on a box watching the performance. He became limber with amusement and good humor. When Skeeter finished, the fruit man gave him a handful of over-ripe bananas and sent him into the back yard to eat. Skeeter grinned as he disappeared. He felt sure that he had at last landed on his feet.

"I knows when I's well off," he told himself. "I done got lucky again. I done got dat fresh start, an' I ain't fix-in' to muf it neither. No suh."

He sat down beneath the horse-chestnut tree that leaned across the fence and began skinning and devouring the ripe fruit.

Later in the afternoon Skeeter discovered a little two-wheeled delivery cart upturned behind a stack of old boxes, out of use. That gave him another thought. He could now become delivery man for Angelo. And that would give him an opportunity to go about the neighborhood and seek amusement during the midday lull. He visualized himself majestically piloting

the empty cart over the rugged side streets, bumping and rattling it with an air of great importance. He could imagine the womenfolks of the neighborhood high-balling him from the kitchen windows, beseeching him to hurry back with a soup bunch or a mess of new potatoes.

"Heah where I puts some git-up in these lil ole sleepy streets," he thought. "When papa Skeeter gits on de road, folks gonna sit up an' take notice. To heah me comin', they gonna think I's drivin' de fire wagon, cause I aims to travel wid norns and drums."

He adjusted a small flat strip of wood on the body of the cart in such a manner as to clap against each spoke when the wheel turned. He hung a tin can to the axle by a string just long enough to let the bottom of the can reach the ground. In the can he put nails and bits of iron, such things as he thought would make a first rate noise to help remind folks that papa Skeeter was on the road.

Angelo was satisfied. If this overgrown black idiot wanted to rattle around the neighborhood with that old discarded cart, he was welcome to do so. Angelo frequently had need of a delivery boy; had in fact, on several occasions hired school boys for this purpose, but he saw no reason why the cart would be needed. In that, however, he let Skeeter have his wish.

Angelo was so well pleased with the comical boy he had hired that on the third day he made the mistake of leaving Skeeter alone in the fruit store. Skeeter began immediately to explore the spaces beneath the counter, the backs of the shelves, and the dark corners of the back room. Within a few moments he had found and substan-

tially damaged a jug of Angelo's private wine.

* * * * *

Meanwhile Skeeter's interest in Adina had stood still. Once or twice since his meal in her kitchen, she had yelled at him pleasantly in the areaway. But he was no better acquainted than he had been the first day he saw her. He wasn't even sure that she would be eligible for his attentions; not knowing her well, he couldn't guess what she would require of a gentleman who came to court her regularly. Now that he was settled, with a job in the fruit store and a cot in the furnace room, she got on his mind again.

"Wonder whut ole good-lookin' 'Dina's doin'," he worried. "Guess she think I done plum forget her. She right, too; I been had me mind on work, an' I been eatin' and drinkin' so much on de side I wa'n't fittin' for nuthin' but sleep when I knocked off in de evenin'."

Skeeter was returning to the fruit store with his empty cart, down a quiet tree-shaded street. The sun was low, the yellow light flashing directly in the black boy's eyes. He had walked rapidly and was dripping with sweat, but he felt good. He felt like chewing the rag with some such big-eyed gal as Adina.

He brought his cart booming into the back alley and wheeled it into the yard behind the fruit store. Then he went inside to tell Angelo he was ready to go home. The fat Italian was nodding on his box. He grunted when Skeeter spoke but paid him no attention. Skeeter's eyes rolled in their deep sockets. As Angelo sank back into slumber the boy quickly grabbed up a small bunch of bananas, perhaps a doz-

en, and three large cocoanuts. With these under his arms he flashed through the back door.

Skeeter went directly to Adina's apartment and rang the bell. She came to the door, mopping the perspiration from her face with the corner of her apron.

"Look lak I's too late." Skeeter said. "Too late for what?"

"For supper. Ain't you done board-ed?"

"Is you hungry? Adina settled back on her heels and seemed exasperated.

"I ain't huntin' grub, sweetness," Skeeter smiled. "I's bringin' you sumpin'. Reckon you could make 'way wid these?"

"Could I! I done et a lil bit," she admitted, "but I ain't half full."

"Well, pitch in, baby. Gimme sumpin' to crack these heah cocoanuts wid."

Skeeter went to work on the hard bells with the aid of a flat iron.

Adina was a matter-of-fact young woman, and one who was not ashamed to eat in the presence of masculine company. Neither was she embarrassed by her weight and the surplus flesh under her chin. She smacked her lips with pleasure as she masticated the cocoanut meat.

Skeeter enjoyed watching her. Tilted backwards and rocking on two legs of his chair, it occurred to him that he and Adina had a great deal in common. Each of them had ravenous appetites and they seemed to like the same foods. That had not been true of the thin hot-tempered girl in Harlem with whom he had failed to live in harmony and from whom he had fled. She liked cold meats, pickles, delicatessen foods; and that sort of thing had irked the Skeeter. Adina was more like his kind,

a gal with a taste for tropical fruits, green vegetables, and pork meat. It was time, he figured, they become better acquainted.

"Is you a single gal, 'Dina?"

"Well yes 'n no. I's a widder woman."

"Oh."

"Ma ole man got hisself a job on de railroad an' I ain't seen head or tail o' him since."

"He done disert you?"

"Um hunh! Tha's it."

"Devilish scoundrel! A nigger lak dat ain't fit to have a good steady woman."

"Sho ain't. But y'all menfolks is putty much all de same."

"Don't say dat, sweetness." Skeeter was deeply serious. "I ain't one o' dem jack rabbit mens. I's a true-love boy."

"Yo' looks is kinda deceivin', papa Skeeter."

"Eve'ybody tell me dat," he said.

"That de frs' thing de Cap'n met me wid. I don't know whut cause it neither."

"Maybe it's a birthmark."

"Mus' be is."

"You ain't never run off an' lef' a lovin' woman whut was good to you?"

"Not lessen she sent me 'way," he vowed. "I been married wid a ole hot-headed gal once—signed up at de cou't house an' got a receipt an' ev'ything—but it ain't mounted to a hill o' beans. Dat gal kicked me out head foremost an' tore up the permit an' th'owed it at me."

"So you's a widder, too?"

"I mean."

"An' you ain't goin' back?"

"How can I go back when she done tore up de permit. I's free as a jay bird."

"Tha's a notion," she said. "I b'lieve I'll tear up mine, too."

Skeeter rolled his eyes at Adina. "Hmp! Tha's whut you gonna have to do," he said. "I gonna see to dat."

"Why you so worried up?"

"I feels ma love comin' down. Tha's how come I's worried. You an' me's gonna be sweet if I's got anything to say 'bout it."

"Hm. You ain't got nuthin' to say 'bout it though, long boy. I'm gonna wait an' make up ma own mind 'bout dat."

"You betta make it up in a hurry," he commanded, "'cause if yo' don't I'm apt to make it up for you."

They understood each other. Skeeter reared back, opened his mouth wide enough to swallow a cocoanut and emitted a gale of laughter that could be heard half a mile. Adina chirped and giggled so hard tears came to her eyes, and the fat on her shoulders shook like jelly.

The next day Skeeter brought Adina a half dozen of Angelo's biggest and finest yams. He hid them in his shirt and slipped away with them while the Italian fruit store man nodded in the entrance of his shop. Adina was delighted and, in return, invited the long boy to stay for dinner. While the two were bending over the steaming plates, she mentioned something to him that was on her mind.

"Is you goin' to de New Covenant bus ride?"

"Whut ole New Covenant bus ride?" Skeeter corrugated his brow. "I ain't heared 'bout no sich come-off."

"No? It's gonna be next week. It's sumpin'."

"Good time, hunh?"

"I mean. Righteous."

"How 'come you ain't invited me to come an' be yo' company?"

"Cause you ain't give me time. I's jes fixin' to say would you like to 'tend?"

"I like to go anywheres you gonna be, honey. All I wants to do is to be wid you. Tha's all I studies 'bout now."

"Well now, 'bout goin' wid me, I er I gotta 'splain dat. Brother Sam Chalmers, de 'sistant shepherd at New Covenant, got his head set on bein' ma company, too."

Skeeter's mouth fell open. It closed and opened again, but no words came. His eyes blinked. He swallowed a lump in his throat. Still he was unable to talk. Adina, seeing that he was paralyzed, hurried to his rescue.

"Course I ain't give him ma word yet," she said. "I jes waitin' to see how you'd take it."

Skeeter regained his strength with a long sigh.

"Honey," he said, "I gonna be so close to you dat day de Brother Sam Chalmers ain't gonna be able to see you for me. An' dat ain't all. I'm gonna bring you an' me mo' good stuff from de fruit sto' 'n you can shake a stick at."

"Dat suits me, son. I'll jest fix up some fried chicken an' sandwiches an' things like that. An' if you makes a good showin' wid de fruits we'll be set for de day."

"Pend on me, baby."

"You'll have to be on de spot early, too. De bus gonna pull out at eight o'clock sharp."

Skeeter smiled broadly. "I'm gonna be sittin' on de church house steps at ha'-past seben."

During the * * * * * that intervened,

Skeeter walked on air. Time after time he unfolded the prospects of that bus ride and picnic in his mind as he expected them to materialize. He would work late the preceding night, however, and while the boss was busy with the last of the customers he would sneak the fruit he wanted into the back room, put it in a basket and cover it. Then he would be careful to unlock the back window. This would enable him to come in by way of the alley, get the fruit and carry it away while Angelo was off with the truck doing the regular wholesale marketing. On the bus and at the picnic, there would be nothing but bliss. Skeeter could see himself lolling on a green spot, legs crossed, a chicken bone in his hand and Adina smiling affectionately at his side, while Brother Sam Chalmers shot malicious glances at them and wrung his hands.

He planned and selected the basket of fruit with an eye toward impressing Adina. The gift should be the last necessary ounce. He had started well, he would be sure to finish strong. To be Adina's company on that bus ride, in the presence of all the church folks would be like a banner in his hand. That was what he wanted. He wanted the world to know he was papa Skeeter from Harlem, the shiniest black boy in that end of town and a devil with the gals.

With these notions stirring in his head, he began the pleasant chore of selecting the fruit. He hid a basket under a pile of sacks in the back room. Then, throughout the day, at such times as he found Angelo's back turned, he slipped oranges, apples, pears, bananas, cocoanuts and canteloupes into it. Skeeter was deft on this busi-

ness. It was not new to him. And when the day preceding the bus ride came, he had a lunch basket assortment worthy of any picnic. It was so "worthy", in fact, Skeeter wondered how he could get the thing away. He lifted it at a time to make sure he could handle it conveniently. Yes, he could manage. The Skeeter put his shoulders back, smiled from ear to ear, and poked out his chest.

The next morning he was out at the crack of day. And when the time came for Angelo to be away with the truck, Skeeter slipped quietly into the yard behind the fruit store.

The window, through which it was necessary to get the basket, had no weight or pulleys. It was a heavy window, and Skeeter could not hold it up while lifting the fruit. So he found a stick of suitable length and with it propped the pane. He then put his head and shoulders through the waist-high window and reached for his treasure.

But as he leaned forward in this position a surprising thing happened. The window came down suddenly with a bang that left Skeeter pinned as tightly as a mouse in a trap, his head and shoulders inside, his body and legs outside.

Angelo, suspecting his store-boy's dishonesty for some days, had discerned Skeeter's plans and set himself accordingly. When Skeeter got his head well through the window, the Italian had quickly slipped from behind the boxes where he was crouched and withdrawn the stick supporting the heavy pane.

So the Skeeter was helpless. Inside,

his little head was all mouth and eyes, bellowing like forty bulls and blazing fire. Outside, his lean frog-like hind-parts wriggled and twisted and beat the air. Angelo went calmly to the corner of the yard, selected a barrel, crushed it, returned with an arm full of staves, took a firm position with heels braced, and began studiously breaking the staves one at a time across the protruding legs and body.

In the meantime a crowd gathered in front of the New Covenant Church. The bus was filled. The driver insisted on getting away on schedule. The motor rumbled and the heavy vehicle pulled out.

Skeeter came around the corner limping like a man with rheumatism, bruised, crestfallen, and empty-handed. He stood with stooped shoulders, nursing his bruises and watching the diminishing picture of his own dreams plowing down the yellow road, obscured by a cloud of dust.

One thing was very distinct. In the back seat was old big-eyed Adina, and beside her the Brother Sam Chalmers. The glossy black deacon was wearing a new milk-white straw hat. His face was split by a smile that rippled like an ocean wave. He was swollen worse than a pouter pigeon, and as he leaned back caressing Adina's broad shoulders with affection and triumph, he shot mean and spiteful glances over his shoulder.

Skeeter blinked, rubbed his tiny slick head and turned his face in the opposite direction. He drew the palm-leaf fan from his pocket, refreshed himself and started walking.

"I'm going back to Harlem," he decided. "This heah place is bad luck."

In Absence

COUNTEE CULLEN

This is a land in which you never were,
A land perchance which you may never see;
And yet the length of it I may not stir,
But your sweet spirit walks its ways with me.
Your voice is in these Gallic accents light,
And sweeter is the Rhenish wine I sip
Because this glass (a lesser Grail) is bright
Illumined by the memory of your lip.
Thus would I have it in the dismal day,
When I fare forth upon another ship,
The heart not warm as now; but cold, and clay;
The journey forced; not, sweet, a pleasure trip.
Thus would I take your image by the hand,
But leave you safe within a living land.

Sonnet

COUNTEE CULLEN

Some for a little while do love, and some for long;
And some sweet few forever and for aye;
Some for the measure of a poet's song,
And some the ribbon width of a summer's day.
Some on a golden crucifix do swear,
And some in blood do plight a fickle troth;
Some struck divinely mad may only stare,
And out of silence weave an iron oath.
So many ways love has none may appear
The bitter best, and none the sweetest worst;
Strange food the hungry have been known to bear,
And brackish water slakes an utter thirst.
It is a rare and tantalizing fruit
Our hands reach for, but nothing absolute.

- On Spirituals -

HARRY T. BURLEIGH

The growing tendency of some of our musicians to utilize the melodies of our spirituals for fox trots, dance numbers and sentimental songs is, I feel, a serious menace to the artistic standing of the race.

These melodies are our prized possession. They were created for a definite purpose and are designed to demonstrate and perpetuate the deepest aesthetic endowment of the race.

In them we have a mine of musical wealth that is everlasting.

Into their making was poured the aspiration of a race in bondage; a race, whose religion, intensely felt, was their whole hope and comfort, and the only vehicle through which their inner spirits soared free.

Now since these folk songs express the soul of a race, they are, in a sense, sacred; set apart to religious use. To use them, and not artificialize or cheapen them, calls for reverence and true devotion to their spiritual significance. Yet I feel these delinquent musicians contemptuously disregard these traditions for personal, commercial gain.

Their use of these melodies (and many of the well known melodies of the great composers debases the pure meaning of the tunes; perverting them into tawdry dance measures, and making them popular songs. Their work is meretricious, sacrilegious, and wantonly destructive. It offends the aesthetic feelings of all true musicians, white and black, and because some of us have endeavored never to sink the high standard of our art, nor commercialize the sacred heritage of our people's song, we feel, deeply that the wilful, persistent, superficial distortion of our folk songs is shockingly reprehensible.

Skilled musicians can detect instantly the flagrant misappropriation, the amateurish distortion. But, there are others, the unskilled musicians and particularly the young people, who cannot detect the misuse of the prayer-songs; who cannot distinguish the secular from the spiritual, and who are thus being misled with a wrong idea, a false valuation of all our beautiful melodic inheritance—unless the pernicious musical trickery

stopped.

How can it be stopped? These gentlemen seem not to realize that they offend the deepest sentiments of the race. They seem incapable of comprehending the enormity of the offense, or the far-reaching effect upon future generations.

The melodies are public property, and there is no way to protect them except through race pride.

Have they sufficient race pride to refuse to cheapen the inherent religious beauty of our spirituals? Can we not convince them that it is all in bad taste; that it is like polluting a great free fountain of pure melody?

In the interest of millions of colored people, who love and revere the spirituals and who believe them to be an essential factor in the cultural evolution of the race, as well as a powerful stimulus to its higher artistic development, and in the interest of millions of white people who love and revere the spirituals, I earnestly solicit the helpful cooperation of all in a determined effort to persuade our misguided friends—singers, players, leaders of orchestras—to stop this desecrating work and to join with us

in protecting from any secular use the Negro spirituals—the only songs in the United States that answer the scientific definition of folk song.

By scientific definition I mean the definition given us by Herbert Spencer who said, "Feelings are muscular stimuli; and all variations of voice are the physiological result of variations of feeling." If that is true (and I believe it is) there you have the explanation of what folk song should be. It must mirror the actual feelings of the people who create it. It cannot be what you have heard about that people or what someone told you about that people. It must come spontaneously from the people themselves.

The spirituals come from the white heat of religious fervor, in protracted meetings in camps and groves, as the simple, ecstatic expression of a wholly untutored people who took this means of giving expression to their religious experience.

They compare favorably with the great folk music of the world, and they typify the race's spiritual ascendancy over oppression and humiliation.

- COOK -

JANE ISAAC

Miss Lavinia Williams had grown past middle age in the kitchen of the Tuckers. She had come as cook when Blake was five, and now he was twenty-five.

Cook was colored a beautiful shade of warm brown. Her grandmother face was quite unlined. Her dark eyes, behind the gold-rimmed glasses, did not twinkle, but they were kind. Her sweet unsmiling mouth talked common sense. But it did not talk very much. Mostly it hummed sad slave songs. Her soft hair with its touches of gray was parted down the center and rolled round in a neat nob. There were little curls in her nape, and sometimes over steam, a fuzz on her forehead. She was middling tall and middling broad. Her hands and feet were large.

None of the Tuckers knew much about cook. To the elders she was a colored person quieter than most, and never giving trouble, nor asking for more money. They didn't like Negroes, particularly, and had no interest in cook's inner life. They only wanted fidelity and servility, and both they got.

But Blake knew this about her, that she had a house in Harlem, to which she went whenever she could, and where she was now going for over Sunday, since he and his parents were spending

the day with grandfather.

He fancied it was a boarding house that she had bought with her savings to keep her declining years in comfort. For the Tuckers discharged old servants without pension or pity.

It was autumn. The oak in the backyard had one orange branch of great beauty. Sometimes a few dry leaves fell on the bulkhead. There were not so many birds. Two very tiny squirrels played happily all day long. The motionless cat lay and looked at them. At night the harvest moon rode swiftly over the sky, more luminous and lovely with each hour. The city stars shone bright for city stars.

Cook was ready. The bus left at ten. It was nine. Mr. Tucker and Blake were at their respective offices. Mrs. Tucker had gone downtown to catch a Saturday sale. The second girl had gone to market. Cook had made up the menus. There were only dinner that evening and breakfast Sunday. She would leave New York Sunday night and be back in Boston in time for breakfast Monday.

She was alone in the house. She had tidied her room and drawn the shades so that the afternoon sun would not shine on the mirror. At two o'clock

each bright afternoon she came upstairs and drew her shades. She was careful of the fine old-fashioned bureau, not because it was Mrs. Tucker's, but because it was beautiful.

Cook came downstairs carrying the overnight bag her niece had given her last Christmas. She was dressed in dark blue and a becoming hat that Mrs. Tucker had got through with. In the bag were, in addition to changes of clothing, a Bible, a modest insurance policy, and a packet of banknotes of the higher denominations to upwards of two thousand dollars.

She got her lunch box out of the frigidaire. There were two minced ham sandwiches, two of egg and olive, two of peanut butter, and a bar of chocolate with nuts that Blake had given her two days ago, and which she had saved for this journey.

She carried a collapsible drinking cup, for she felt it improper to suck tonic through a straw. And she could not bring herself to drink from a glass that the soda jerker simply rinsed in a little clear water.

One last thing, her umbrella in the back vestibule. This she got. And this morning she would go out the front door, because the back door did not lock of itself, and there was no one to lock it after her. She quitted the kitchen and went through the halls. The house was quietly elegant, but she was unimpressed. There was nothing in sight she wanted or did not have.

There was quite a walk to the carline. A cruising cabby accosted her, but she stomped on stolidly. Why should she pay a dollar to go the identical distance she could go for a dime? Money was got by the sweat of one's brow; or at least the dependable part of it.

The bus was on time. Presently the seats were all full, with Cook in the uncomfortable one over the wheel, where almost inevitably, as if by design, except that there is no prejudice in Boston, the colored passenger is put.

She leaned back and relaxed. She was one of those people who never get used to travel. It was always an enormous strain until she was settled in her seat, and it began to be a strain again when she was near her destination.

The driver came to hoist up baggage. He bent to Cook's valise, but she gripped it firmly.

He argued mildly, "You gotta keep it outta the aisle, lady."

She put it between herself and her seatmate. The lady was Jewish and friendly and did not mind. Later they would share the lunch box, and the Jewish lady would pay for the pop.

But for the moment there were no words between them. Cook, with the bus in motion, knew that she would nod. It was funny to see her catch herself out of sleep, and then slide back again, and again jerk awake, until finally and soundly she slept, with her hat awry.

It was noon when she roused. The passengers were piling out for refreshments. The Jewish lady's, "Poddun me!" awoke her. She took her bag and her lunch box and followed her.

They both talked with little grunts and soft groans and vast gestures.

It was early evening when Cook reached New York. She knew the way from bus stop to subway. The push and bustle bothered her, but did not overly confuse her. Soon she was thru the turnstiles and in the crowded train, hanging on to a greasy strap, and peering anxiously at the flying platforms.

At the 135th Street stop she got out, walked one block west and four blocks north, and there she was on Strivers' row, the 200 block of 139th Street.

She stopped before an imposing house, mounted the stone steps, rang the bell beneath the doctor's plate, and waited in warm anticipation.

A black maid opened the door and beamed broadly.

"Welcome home, Miss Williams!"

"It's nice to see you, Annie! All you all well?"

"Well, Henry was having a baby, and it made him drive nervous, but it's twins, and they're doing nicely, and so is Henry."

Somebody shouted down, "Aunt Viney, Aunt Viney! Bless your old heart!"

It was young Lestra. She flew down-stairs and gathered Viney in her arms.

"I met two trains, and I've been up-stairs listening for taxis. Did you fly, funny woman?"

"I came by bus and took the subway. All told two dollars and five cents."

One might have said she smiled sardonically.

Lestra laughed, and they went up-stairs with their arms around each other. Annie put the umbrella in the stand and followed with the bag. She thought Miss Williams was very eccentric.

Dell Clement in becoming negligee met them under the flattering hall light. She was as beautifully imposing as the house. Education had worked its usual miracle. She and Viney were sisters. But Viney, the elder, had slaved and saved to send Adele thru grade school and high school and college. And now Dell stood in her mellow yellow loveliness as unlike Viney, her sister, as Mrs.

Tucker was unlike Viney, her cook.

"Dear, dear Viney!" she exclaimed, with an elegance that was becoming in her drawing-room, but before Viney was simply putting on airs. For the first duty of the gracious is to put the awkward at ease. And Viney was always uncomfortable around Dell.

She offered, "Well, you look well, Dell!" and dared not disarrange that crimson mouth, and brushed Dell's bloodless cheek.

"Age does not wither nor custom stale—.' Don't gape, Annie. Viney, let her have your things, and come along with me. I want a visit with you before the guests arrive."

She stood divested and dismayed. "You all having a party?"

Lestra was resentful, too. "Darling, dad and I begged her to postpone it when we knew you were coming. But there's a bird in town who's being parted. And you know Dell."

She was unperturbed. "If some one asks you to play tonight, Lestra, mind you be nice about it."

"I hate playing for a parcel of drunks. They only ask to be polite, and nobody pays attention. And when I play, I sweat blood, and I hate to sweat blood to no purpose."

But Dell was disdainful. "You're only putting on because Viney's here to take your part. Come along with me, Viney. I want to rest my face before the evening starts."

They went into Dell's bedroom. It was in excellent taste, without frills and with subdued lights.

"Ah, but perhaps you want to rest your face, too? Shall we go into your room? Or will the chaise longue do?"

"It'll do," said Viney, going to sit bolt upright on the edge of it. "I had a good sleep coming. And I don't know

how to rest my face unless you mean by yawning."

Dell, lying flat on the bed, looked at her critically. "Viney, why is it you haven't a line or a wrinkle, and you're fifty? And you've worked like a dog all your life, and I've been a lady since you sent me to boarding school when I was seven, and you were seventeen, and already a cook in the white folks' kitchen."

She said without sadness, "Because I was so tired after supper that I went straight to bed and straight to sleep, while the rest of the world was sitting up studying."

Dell lit a cigarette with a lovely gesture. "Did you ever envy me, my poor Viney?"

"When I sent you to boarding school, I didn't. You were so lost looking and little. And then when I sent you up north to college, I was glad you was getting out of the south. And when you married Neil, I just couldn't envy no woman no man. Not that Neil ain't the nicest, and I was happy to help him get started. But I guess I'm a born old maid."

"But when Lestra was born, and I come north to see her, I cried. I loved her so much I almost hated her because she wasn't mine. I'd had something to do with everything else, but I hadn't had nothing to do with that. And she was the first and only thing I'd ever really wanted."

"Darling, Lestra loves you as much as she loves me."

"All this house means to me is that it's a roof over her head. I guess that's how come God give me this power to foresee. I don't never selfishly use

it. I got a considerable sum in my suitcase right now. And I reckon before morning the Lord'll direct me how best to bestow it."

Dell got terribly excited. She sat up straight. Her face was no longer resting.

"Viney, have you hit the number again? Good God, when? For how much?"

Viney enjoyed it. "Well, now, Dell, I guess it's too late for you to give a more elaborate party. And what else do you ever want money for? If you'd followed Lestra's mind and put off your doings, I reckon we could have scraped up a hundred or so for a fancy frock."

Dell was utterly dismayed. She made a disdainful gesture. "And I've already worn that wretched dress four times. And there was such a bargain at a shop on 57th Street. Ninety-eight dollars, and too too divine." She cast a sidelong glance at Viney. "But the Carter's dinner is Wednesday."

"Well," said Viney indulgently, "if the Lord directs me to make you a present, it'll be a party frock."

Dell was satisfied. She drew a long breath and settled back. Viney saw with surprise that her face did seem to be resting. There was even something pathetic about her. She was like a child who has been appeased with the promise of a toy. And out of her loins had come that miracle, Lestra, who was so removed from trivialities. Well, Lestra was of Dell's body, but her soaring spirit was of God.

"Viney, what on earth did you dream this time?"

"Well, seems like I saw a man standing on a precipice like he was fixing to fall. So I started running toward him. And when I come up close, I called, and

he turned, and it was Neil.

"Well, I just stopped dead, and I said, 'Oh, oh!' And I woke myself up saying it. And there I lay with my mouth wide open. And that was another O."

"OOO," said Dell. "What a crazy number."

"Well, I hit it just the same. Next day. And happen the Merivales was leaving that morning. They'd been the Tuckers' guests two weeks. And Mrs. Merivale, she come and give me five dollars. And, of course, that was the Lord's direction. Because all along the Merivales had been planning to leave Saturday. And here they was going unexpected Friday."

"Wouldn't your Lord like it if you sometimes played with your salary?"

"I ain't a gambler. I've seen too many folks go clean fool playing them numbers every day. Me, I follows my dreams, and plays with change I pick up here and there. If I don't get a hit but once in six months, I'm satisfied. I was cooking for my living before numbers was ever thought of. And I ain't going to sit down now and let 'em support me."

"Well, darling, go on about its being Friday and the five dollars."

"Well, seemed like I'd never get thru serving breakfast. First there was one thing wanted, then another. Working for second-class white folks! Lord, lord! But finally I was free, with my table cleared and my dishes stacked. And I run on down to the cobbler's. Sam is a right enough bootblack there, but it's mostly a blind, and he does more business than Toney."

"It was past twelve already, and Sam leaves around one to collect the rest of his numbers. You'd be surprised at

the parcel of white folks that play with him. Why, our policeman hit three times last month, for fifty cents each time."

Dell cried out impatiently, "Viney, don't talk around! So you put five dollars on OOO, and oh, my God, you must have over two thousand dollars! Viney, where's that money right now?"

"In my bag 'long with my papers. I always carry my insurance papers with me, 'cause you never can tell where death 'll overtake you. And I want whoever finds me to see I've got enough for a proper burial. I've lived decent, and I'll lie in my coffin likewise."

"Viney, will you march yourself to your room and get that money, and bring it here to me to put in my safe? My God, you know a hundred niggers will be running amuck here tonight. And there isn't one of them who couldn't use two thousand dollars."

Viney escaped rather gratefully. There just wasn't an atmosphere of righteousness in Dell's room. She was not at all sure that Dell's thoughts dwelt much on her Maker. She understood how white folks could forget God. They had so many other things to study. But colored folks were too few generations removed from sorrow songs and slavery. How could they forget the God of deliverance? Why, she well remembered when Dell would boast that Lestra had never heard a spiritual sung or been inside a Negro church.

Viney's room was at the farthest end of the hall. Adjacent was a French door that opened onto a little balcony. Not until she had almost reached it was she aware that the door was open and a man stood in silhouette.

"Oh," she cried. "Oh, my goodness!" and her mouth was agape.

The figure turned and came forward. It was Neil in tuxedo with both hands outstretched.

"Lavinia! I was waiting to welcome you. I didn't want to disturb you and Dell."

He kissed her cheek and pressed her hands warmly.

Viney fluttered. "You gave me a start, but I'm real glad to see you. Let's go in my room and sit down a spell. I want a good look at you."

Neil locked the door and followed her into the cheerful room that Dell had told the decorator was to be her elderly mother's; and was therefore not a terrifying place with newfangled furniture, but was instead expensively arranged with fine old-fashioned pieces.

There was a dreamy light over everything. Viney sank into a rocker, and Neil went to stretch his long body in a wide-armed chair.

He was still alert and lean. Lestra had got his sensitive hands and head of wild curls. His eyes had seen much suffering and mirrored it. He was a very beautiful pale ivory man who had never been a gay boy, and had loved no woman but Dell, and Dell not very much, having loved humanity too largely, and not any one woman's glowing body.

Tonight his mouth was tired, and his hands were making his hair more unruly than ever. Now he slumped forward and stared unseeingly at the overnight bag at his feet.

"Neil, you worried 'bout some patient?" asked Viney gently.

"Why do people go on having children? Why in God's name don't they stop it? Babies are born, and babies die, and why should they live so briefly? Suppose my Lestra had been still-

born, and her gift gone with her? And there are other infant Lestras, dead with their songs in their silent throats. Oh, God, Negro children die in droves; and they are all our hope."

"You're a great doctor, Neil, and you heal with love as well as learning. So if you can't save 'em nobody can. And there ain't no use your worrying."

"I ought to take it up with your God. He's known to keep an eye on sparrows. I wish He'd stretch out a hand to these little blackbirds."

"My God is ever mindful of the least of His flock. And the children of Ham ain't least. The meek will inherit the earth. And the Ethiop will wipe out his oppressors."

He smiled at her unshakable faith. It made his face softer. He straightened up and stuck his hands in his pockets.

"Well, I'd like to see some quicker action. I hate to wait for the coming of the Ethiop. Couldn't I take it up with your God right now? I say, man to man, our Father in Heaven, give me a hospital to give to sick children. For I cannot bear any longer the lame and the halt and the blind."

He swung out his feet as he settled back.

The overnight bag toppled over with a bang.

"Well, I didn't expect such a speedy reply!"

But Viney was ashen and reverent.

"Don't mock! Don't dast! God has answered!"

He looked at her searchingly. "What does He say?"

"I hear Him like He was speaking inside me. Here is My House. Take it," She said apologetically, "I reckon that's a parable."

But Neil jumped up and began striding up and down. His shadow leaped along the wall. It was gigantic.

"Oh, my God, Lavinia, don't you see? This house. This fine big house. Oh, my God! I can make it a fine big hospital. Here in this room there'll be four little beds and four little boys. Lavinia! But this is your room. This is your house."

She said very simply, "Take it."

He halted before her and stared down at her hard.

"Your God is human," he said humbly.

But he began to tear about again.

"Lavinia, you're not a young woman. And there's Dell, who's got used to this way of living. And Lestra, who will never go to business."

"About me, Neil, I'm the kind what dies in harness. I ain't one that'll ever be a dependent. And my little insurance ain't life. It's an endowment, come due in fifteen years. And I reckon with careful managing I can make it last till the chariot swings low, with enough left, God willing, for a funeral with flowers.

And Dell, she's my own sister, but she ain't the type to shed tears about. I reckon you'll always have a hundred for a party frock. And as long as you're a doctor, she'll be a dicty. And there ain't nothing else she worries about.

"And Lestra, as long as she has her piano, you can give her dry bread and water, and she'd still be fed of the spirit wine and wafer."

Neil stopped his walking and leaned against the wall. His face was young and full of faith.

"Few men see their dreams come true, and mine was a very vast vision.

Monday I've a million things to do. I think I can get hold of a thousand dollars. The few I have are tied up in that bank."

"Neil, there's twenty-five hundred dollars in that bag."

"What——? Lavinia! Have you won again? And you'd give it to me? In God's name, who are you?"

"I'm the lowliest of the flock. I'm a servant to second-class white folks."

"Our lives run parallel. I'm a servant, too. Only my humans are called humanity."

The little clock struck the hour tunelessly. Neil larged about.

"This is my last night to be a proper husband. I'll go and be a gracious host, and let you dress. Shan't I send Lestra to help you?"

Viney, left alone, sighed and wriggled her feet. She had been all day in street shoes, and she yearned for her kitchen comforts. And now she must put on her high Cuban heels and go sit in a corner of Dell's drawing-room, with silly young men saying silly things in affected voices.

She was tired, because there is no hardship to be compared to riding nine hours in a bus. There were also little gnawings in her stomach. The Jewish lady had eaten largely of her lunch. But even if she hadn't, cold sandwiches at twelve and two are not a hot dinner at six.

Some one knocked at her door.

"Come!" She called.

It was Annie.

"Miss Lestra says, please can you come up to her studio if it isn't any trouble?"

Viney got up. "Any company come yet, Annie? I don't want to run into anybody."

"Lordy, no! They're s'pose to come at nine, so the bell'll start ringing good at ten. Guess you'll never get used to New York folks, Miss Williams. I ain't used to 'em myself. T'ain't much like down home."

Viney went upstairs to the big attic room that had been converted into a studio for Lestra and the grand piano that she had given her.

She knocked and entered.

"Lestra?"

She sat at her piano in the far end of the attic. A floor lamp made a circle of light around her. The rest of the room was in shadow.

Lestra was now in slender and shimmering white. Her hair that had been carefully combed and brushed was beginning to curl again. It was Neil's magnificent head. She was utterly like him, except that, being darker, she was lovelier.

She struck a chord for the express purpose of startling Viney, then wheeled about and faced her.

"Father says I've got to get out. What's this about a hospital?"

She was severe and aggrieved.

Viney sat down in an uncertain chair.

"Lestra! You know your father never told you to get out like that. I reckon he'll get you all a nice little flat on Sugar Hill."

"And will it have an attic room like this, please tell me? Don't you know, dear aunt, that this is two houses?"

She was not afraid of Lestra. "It'll make a nice big hospital."

Lestra was suddenly as young as she was. "Don't I matter? Is it because father's proved his genius? But I have potentialities. My hands can work wonders, too. My fingers can perform

miracles."

She turned back to her piano, because she was ever too proud to show tears.

"Play something sweet," said Viney complacently. "Lands! I don't hear nothing but jazz, jazz, jazz! Blake and his old radio."

But she was yet too troubled. "But, Aunt Viney, suppose they won't let me play after ten? They'd call it 'no noise'! And suppose I feel like playing at one? Oh, God! Oh, God!"

"I declare," said Viney nervously, "You all in this house are forever calling 'Lord, Lord!' and not one of you ever goes inside a church."

"Oh, church! I am God. You are God. Father's God. Only mother is mortal."

"Lestra!" She was wholly aghast.

Lestra swung up, quickly crossed the floor, and knelt at Viney's feet, with her fine white frock a silver spray around her.

"Forgive me, darling! I, too, live by faith. But I believe in beauty and fire and truth. And I will be these things. And I will sing them in songs of myself. There is a maestro in Italy. Would God he knew I was on earth."

It was not funny. It was solemn and beautiful.

"What is a maestro, lamb?"

"A master."

"Way yonder in Italy? There's a sight of sea between you. That's sure enough one more river to cross!"

"Aunt Viney, people go to Europe every day."

"Your pa and ma wouldn't hear of it, with you still in college."

"Father's forgotten I'm on earth, what with his old hospital. And mother would love to tell all the dicties she had a daughter studying abroad."

"Lestra, iamb," said Viney helplessly, "all that'd take a heap of money."

"Father says you've got some for him. Can't you spare me enough for my passage? He won't mind. Third class is less than a hundred. And if you'll give me a hundred more to carry me awhile, why if my master believes in my ability, he'll find a way to keep me."

"If your master believes in your ability, my Master will find a way."

There was a burst of blatant music from below.

"Lord," said Viney, scrambling up, "lemme go see 'bout that money."

Lestra got up, too. She was very excited. "I'll go and get drunk to celebrate."

But she was only teasing Viney.

Viney hurried downstairs ahead of her, and scuttled past Dell's open door before any of the luxurious ladies could spy her. She possibly knew a few of them by sight, and small talk was ever pure agony to her.

She reached her room, locked the door, and drew a long breath of relief. There lay the bag. She fetched her purse from the bureau, got out her key and opened it.

Her nightgown lay on top. It twinkled up at her. She was not surprised to hear it say, Put me on.

Well, if she just loosened her stays and lay across the bed for a minute. Right now they were probably dancing downstairs. She would be in the way, or what was worse, some young man might ask her to dance. When the buffet was served she'd go down. For Dell mightn't like it if she didn't. Or Neil mightn't like it. Or maybe Lestra mightn't.

But she knew she was not really on

their minds in this moment. Not that they loved her less, but there were larger problems of introducing people, and passing drinks, and matching partners.

She took off her glasses and slipped off her dress to loosen her stays. And what with thinking on this and that, she was undressed and in her gown before she knew it.

Well, she might as well brush her teeth and in general freshen up. She went into the bathroom. Above the running of the bath water her voice soared in unmusical lament.

She came back sparkling and sweet, and turned down the bed, and puffed up the pillow. It was past her usual bedtime. At the white folks' she would have been asleep an hour. But this was holiday. She would snatch forty winks and rise and shine.

She got her insurance papers and carefully placed them under her pillow, giving them a loving little pat. She left the money in the unlocked bag. There was wisdom in this. She would rather steer a thief to an obvious cache than have him strangle her life out for a packet of greenbacks under her head.

She snapped out the light and slipped in the cool clean bed.

The harvest moon put patches on the wall. Music and laughter drifted up. Viney smiled and wriggled her toes. She wondered if Dell would mind very much having to give up the house. She herself had lived with white folks so long she had no feeling about front doors. Having had so little all her life, she had got used to having nothing. She knew without resentment that what the Lord gave He could take away. And she blessed the name of the Lord.

Lestra was going to Europe. Lestra

was setting sail on an unknown sea. God, guide her craft. Bring her safe to some shore. For Lestra is my life. I began to live when Lestra was born. I was a slave unmindful of my chains. But with Lestra's birth I began to be. Lestra was born of Dell's body, but of my desires that were buried in me with all my bright youth when mama died.

I'm an ignorant old woman. I will leave no monument. There is only my blood in Lestra's young body. Maybe I, too, might have been something won-

derful. Education is everything.

She wanted to pray. She wanted to pray that Lestra might live long, and continue well, and grow into greatness, and not forget God.

She got up and knelt by the side of the bed. Her thin plaits hung over her breasts. Her face was infinitely pure.

After a long time she got back in bed, and knew rather guiltily that she would not get up again. So she found the most comfortable spot, settled herself, slept, and after a little, snored.

The First Kiss

LUCIA MAE PITTS

The moon is blackened, ominous thunder rolls,
 The silence of the night is cleft apart.
 While frightened mortals guard their sin-sick souls,
 I lie at peace, with you against my heart.
 For Fate has led me to your arms at last
 And I have felt your fervid mouth on mine. . . .
 With giant limbs we overstepped the past
 To feast ourselves together on sweet wine.
 I have not known my lips to bear such thirst—
 Nor, having it, that one could slake it so. . . .
 You fill my heart till it will surely burst
 And I must die. Oh, sweet such death, I know!

Though night is sable black, pregnant with rain,
 I am at peace—your mouth on mine again. . . .

Widow with a Moral Obligation

By Helene Johnson

Won't you come again, my friend?
I'll not be so shy.
I shall have a candle lit
To light you by.
I shall have my hair unbound,
My gown undone,
And we shall have a night of love
And death in one.
I was very foolish
To have run away before,
But you see I thought I heard
Him knocking at the door,
But you see I thought I saw
Him smiling in your smile,
And I saw his lips call
Me something very vile.
It must have been my conscience
Or a quirk in my head,
For I knew he'd been
A long time dead.
We buried him one morning
In the sweet cool rain.
But when you come tonight,
We must bury him again.
You must come and rid me
Of my dear leal wraith.
We can bury him so easy
When he's lost his faith.
Stab with little poniards—
Every kiss will be a knife.
And we will be cruel,
For life is life.
Ah come again, my friend,
I'll not be so shy.
I shall have a candle lit
To light you by.
I shall have my hair unbound,
My gown undone,
And we shall have a night of love
And death in one.

DEAR READER

It gives us considerable pleasure to print excerpts from these letters to the Editor, because they were written for our eye alone and are from the heart. If subsequent letters are self-consciously written, we shall be sorry.

We received many communications, from China even, where Pearl S. Buck writes that she will send us an editorial by the next boat, and Edward J. O'Brien sends a similar promise from Oxford. There were other letters, and for all of them we are grateful.

Countee Cullen writes in part, "I hope you are getting in touch with Langston (Hughes); he has been doing some very good prose recently . . . I wish I had his objectivity. . . . Lord knows I wish we could recapture the spirit of '26; I hope the bird hasn't flown forever. And there must be ever so many new recruits who would flock to the sort of banner you are raising! I rather look to them instead of to us who have grown old before our time."

Carl Van Vechten closes with, "silver spoons to you and five blue and green dolphins!"

From Charles S. Johnson at Fisk comes, "The current here, as generally, seems to be more in the direction of prose than poetry. This may seem significant for literary people. . . . I happen to be in the midst of a very consuming task at the moment of analysing and interpreting the results of my study of Negro college graduates. There will be something that I shall want to say on this when I have gotten farther along."

We like Arna Bontemps' letter, ". . . with the chickens to be fed and the fall garden to be tended I'm a busy man. Then there is the Scottsboro thing at our door, and the production of 'St. Louis Woman' in Cleveland (for my fancy), and the new book (only begun) which, of course, is my daily meat and drink, and withal I am a busy man and a lazy one. . . . I have just one poem of recent date that has not been published. I am holding it as one sometimes holds a good-luck penny, lest he should go completely broke. But I had a short story that might do, and if you will give me time to find it and make a copy, I'll gladly send it along for your brave new project."

* * * * *

This magazine is primarily an organ for the new voice. It is our plan to bring out the prose and poetry of the newer Negroes. We who were the New Negroes challenge them to better our achievements. For we did not altogether live up to our fine promise.

Dorothy West

VOICES

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON, the dean of Negro letters, sends us an introductory editorial from Fisk. We are sorry we are going to press before our review of his highly praised autobiography, "*Along This Way*", is ready.

PAULI MURRAY, a student at Hunter College, is a new voice. She is young. She promises much. We anticipate more of her work.

COUNTEE CULLEN, the poet, will conduct our book review column.

JANE ISAAC, a new writer, sends us her manuscript from Cambridge, with a charming letter pledging her cooperation.

HARRY T. BURLEIGH, the eminent composer, and baritone soloist at St. George's in New York, is one of the music editors of the international house, Ricordi and Company.

MARY CHRISTOPHER is, we believe, a pseudonym for a young woman who went to Russia a year ago with an acting company. If she has written other things, we hope she will send us more of her manuscripts.

ARNA BONTEMPS hardly needs an introduction. He is one of the race's leading poets and prose writers. His new child's book, 'You Can't Pet a Possum', will be a Morrow summer publication.

LUCIA MAE PITTS writes letters quite comparable with her poetry. Hers is an engaging pen. We hope she will be a steady contributor.

GRACE WALKER was referred to us by Charles S. Johnson with sincere praise of her talent. We heartily agree with him.

GRACE TURNER, a Boston teacher and artist, gives us our first cover. She has done much other graceful work. We look forward to more.

HELENE JOHNSON is perhaps the most highly rated of the women poets. We would like to see her more often in print.

LANGSTON HUGHES has sent us, we sincerely believe, one of the finest stories of the month. We are proud to publish it.